9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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baskets, and of creels and other objects of wickerwork. To do the subject justice would require a large volume, and we must confine ourselves to some broad aspects. We have referred to creels and kishes of various kinds in Chapter 12. These are objects which the countryman makes for himself, as distinct from the "fancy" basket work which is generally in the hands of special families. To take the creels first, they are constructed bottom-upwards in the same way as the framework of the Boyne curragh, by sticking the stout standards in the earth as though to make wattles and bending them over to form the foundation of the bottom. Strong black sally, hazel or rowan are employed instead of the soft basket willows. The standards are left projecting above the rim of the creel when it is finished, so that the sides do not lift off. But a well woven "mouth" is also necessary to prevent slipping: it may be made single or double. Both creels and kishes may have windows in the sides (Chapter 12 and Fig. 58), an ornamental feature also found in the old wicker cradles. Creels and kishes may be loosely or tightly woven according to whether they are intended for turf or manure. Openwork creels are made in Co. Antrim by pegging the side rods into the two corner standards at intervals of about 4 inches. The old custom in Donegal is to repair two old creels and make two new ones each year. (*See Plate V.*)

Lobster-pots (Chapter 16), stock-pots, fruit and fish hampers, are made on a perforated wooden frame which may be regarded as a substitute for the earth, but most of the

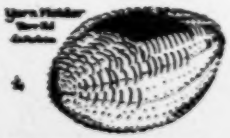

Fig. 73. Length 19".

"fancy work" is undertaken by specialized basket makers, and we can do no more than indicate the variety and skill of their products. There are certain localities where the tradition of basket-making is strong, for instance the shores of

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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CHAPTER XVI.

THE SEASHORE.

The seashore, where the first Irishmen picked up a living some thousands of years ago, still plays a significant role in the islands and around the coasts and is laid under contribution for seaweed and drift weed (wrack), for sand and gravel, and for accessory supplies of food. On many an Irish strand too, seasonal festivals, horse-racing and country games have only slowly given way to holiday makers from the city. Communal rights in the seashore were jealously guarded, and one constantly comes across ancient customs that have survived in this most changeless of environments. I recall the countryman " on the brew " (bureau ; that is, on the dole) whom I watched in County Down twisting on his bare thigh, his palm dried with a dusting of wood-ash from the hearth, the two-ply " crop " of horse-hair for his fishing line—each ply consisting of twenty-one strands taken from the tail of a white mare. This method of twisting is found amongst almost all primitive peoples, and can be paralleled, for instance, from the remote Andaman Islands. His outfit for codling fishing is illustrated in Fig. 94, which shows two hair crops attached to a home-made sinker of lead—called from its shape a " frog " ; the use of horse-hair has survived in this case because it is stiffer than gut and serves to keep the hooks from fouling each other. Rock-fishing lines in Co. Antrim are sometimes made of black horse-hair, but for the part next the hook, called the foot-line, white hair is used. Well-made lines of carefully selected hair

22 [283] 227 226 [237]

[TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P. 144—ANALYST]

[p. 143]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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226 227 are said to last a lifetime. I have seen such lines twisted between the palms of the hand and also made by spinning round a cap to which the two loose ends are pinned. In County Galway similar foot-lines are made of mixed horse and

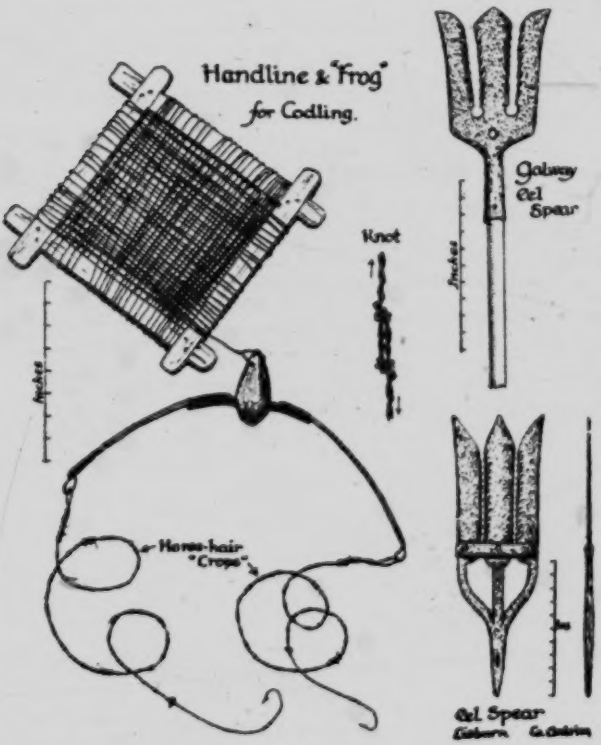

Fig. 94.

[284] [827] cow hair. The short lengths of hair cord are tied with a special knot (Fig. 94) which is " set " with saliva. Horse-hair cords were formerly used to fasten together the curragh framework in Donegal.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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larger fish, including cod and skate, are generally caught on "long lines," hung with hundreds of hooks, in deeper water. The antiquity of some such method of fishing is suggested by the discovery of cod bones with the remains of our raised beach cultures. Old fashioned devices are found in long-line fishing, too: floats of inflated dog skin ("stookies") and sinkers of grooved stone (Fig. 95) are in daily use.

Fig. 95.

The illustration also shows a grooved stone resembling the type well known to archæologists as grooved hammer-stones. This example was employed as a 10 lb. weight for weighing wool. I have seen similar stones kept for weighing butter and kelp.

The line baskets present interesting variations of shape: I illustrate (Fig. 76) examples from Co. Antrim and from Co. Galway. The long Aran basket has a raised end, while the Waterford pattern is a short shallow basket. Types of net

Fig. 96.

for inshore fishing, including salmon nets, differ considerably from place to place and need study. Mention should also be made of the "otter," better known from its adoption in mine-sweeping as the paravane, which is widely used for

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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netting in sea and lake and for poaching. And in this connexion one may whisper that the illegal eel-spear (Fig. 94), the leister or salmon spear, and the trout net (Fig. 96)[1] will sometimes be shown to the discreet inquirer. Old garden forks and shovels are often fashioned into spears by the smith. Resinous bog-fir sometimes provided the torches for " burning the river " in salmon-poaching. Much might be said of these dark practices, but this is not the place to give away all the secrets of the countryside. We may properly refer to the huge " legitimate " catches of eels in weirs such as those of " the fishy fruitful Bann."

The well-known curraghs of the Boyne and the west coast have recently been described in James Hornell's book, " British Coracles and Irish Curraghs," but details of rowing and sailing craft of all kinds should be recorded and sketched before regional types give way, as they are slowly doing, to standardised boats. It is probably not too much to say that every coastal county, every large river and lake, has its own traditional styles of vessels, and their comparative study would be an important contribution to science. Some of the small oval curraghs of the Boyne are still covered with cow-hide, but tarred canvas has taken its place in the larger sea-going curraghs of the west coast. These display many interesting variations according to local conditions and custom, but all, with the exception of the paddle curraghs of Tory Island, are fitted with single thole pins on which the oars swivel, the wooden pin passing through a hole in the heavy " bool " of the oar (Fig. 99). This curious device is employed also on some river and lake boats (e.g., the Corrib, the Shannon and Lough Neagh) and was until recent years found on the fishing boats of the Scotch Quarter at Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim. I have no information on the distribution of the single thole-pin oar outside Ireland, except that Mr. Hornell has reported (in a letter) that the method is used in the Sudan on the Nile. It is true of such ethnographical studies

[TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P. 150 -- ANALYST]

[1] Similar poaching nets were made in the Hebrides—and probably also in Ireland—of heather stems and even sedge roots (*Carex flacca*).

[416]

501

Fig. 99.

[824]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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Fig. 100.
Total length 50"

as of other branches of the sciences of humanity that we know more of the ways of remote peoples of the world that we do of our own folk (Figs. 97 and 98, and Plate VI).

Before leaving the sea and coming back to shore, brief reference must be made to some other sea-creatures which have contributed to the economy of the coasts. There is the basking shark of the Aran Islands pursued in curraghs and captured with a harpoon of the type shown in Figure 100. Seals, despite the many superstitions attaching to them, have been hunted for their skins; according to an old account the skins were made into covers for the oval curraghs of the Rosses in Donegal. It is recorded that seal-catchers in Co. Cork wore on their arms "bags quilted with charcoal." The seals when they bite are said to let go the hold when they hear the crunch of the charcoal.

Shore-collecting plays a varied if nowadays greatly reduced part in the life of coastal communities. The great days of kelp-burning, when the strong dense smoke drifted far inland, are no more, but this once flourishing industry has left its traces in half-ruined kelp-kilns (Fig. 101) and in various rusting hooks and drags (102, 103) which betray the keen rivalry shown in gathering the crop. The best weeds (tangle or "fyams," that is, *Laminaria*) were cut in deep water and their value was enhanced if they were free of sand. The men would sometimes have their knives and sickles fitted with handles as much as twenty feet long: women and children with back creels, assisted by donkeys or ponies with side-creels, did the carrying. In Aran the creel women protect their backs from the damp seaweed by wearing a goatskin.

Fig. 101.

Carting or "drawing" the wrack for manuring the fields is still an active industry in spring on most Irish shores. The wrack is often carried some miles inland, and there are many stories of the contraband goods once smuggled from the coast under cover of loads of piled wrack. In Carlingford Lough, where the tides run high, wide stretches of foreshore are "planted" with rows of boulders in orderly fields called "plans." The bladderwrack which grows on the stones is

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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cut with toothed sickles in spring: as in parts of Connacht great rafts of cut seaweed, bound with a rope or with a sugán of wrack, are floated ashore on the flood tide. Seaweed is highly valued as a manure for potatoes on the sandy soils of low-lying coasts—"the potatoes are well-salted before they are gathered"—and it is said to swell the tubers so that they can be readily peeled by machinery. Since in addition the watery potatoes absorb little fat in frying, they are in great demand by the fish-and-chip shops: the export from south Down, for instance, goes largely to the mining districts of south Wales.

222
[413]
[244]

Fig. 102.

[439]

Fig. 103.
Scale as for Fig. 102.

231
222
262

Some seaweeds are boiled and fed to cattle, other varieties are considered good for pigs, while several kinds are gathered for human consumption:—the strong-tasting dulse, dried and sold in sea-side shops and fairs, purple laver (sloke) and carrageen. I have no evidence for Ireland, but Pennant states that the goatherds of nearby Jura used to make cheese without salt, "lapped in tang and salted with the ashes of sea tang."

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228
[439]

Shell-fish of many species—especially winkles—are gathered for home use and are exported in large quantities to England. Young and old may be seen gleaning among the stones at spring tides, and I have known large families who are almost wholly dependent on this ancient strand-collecting life. The larger shells such as mussels and scallops had a variety of uses in the home. Crabs and lobsters caught in rock-holes might be included here, but the "lobster-pot" gets most of this harvest of the sea. Several types of pot are in use. In the north the round-topped netted frame has gained ground generally, but the stronger wicker pots (Fig. 104) are retained for crabs and for trapping bait. In the west the old styles hold their own while a cylindrical variety, probably of French origin, is found on the south coast. Mr. Brian O'Kelly informs me that the lobster-fishermen of west Cork prefer the round wicker pot, but that the netted frame is used in the south-east in addition to the cylindrical variety. The netted frame differs from the type found in the north in that the entrance is on top or at one end instead of at the side.

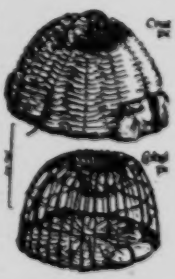
Fig. 104.
Upper, Antrim.
Lower, Kerry.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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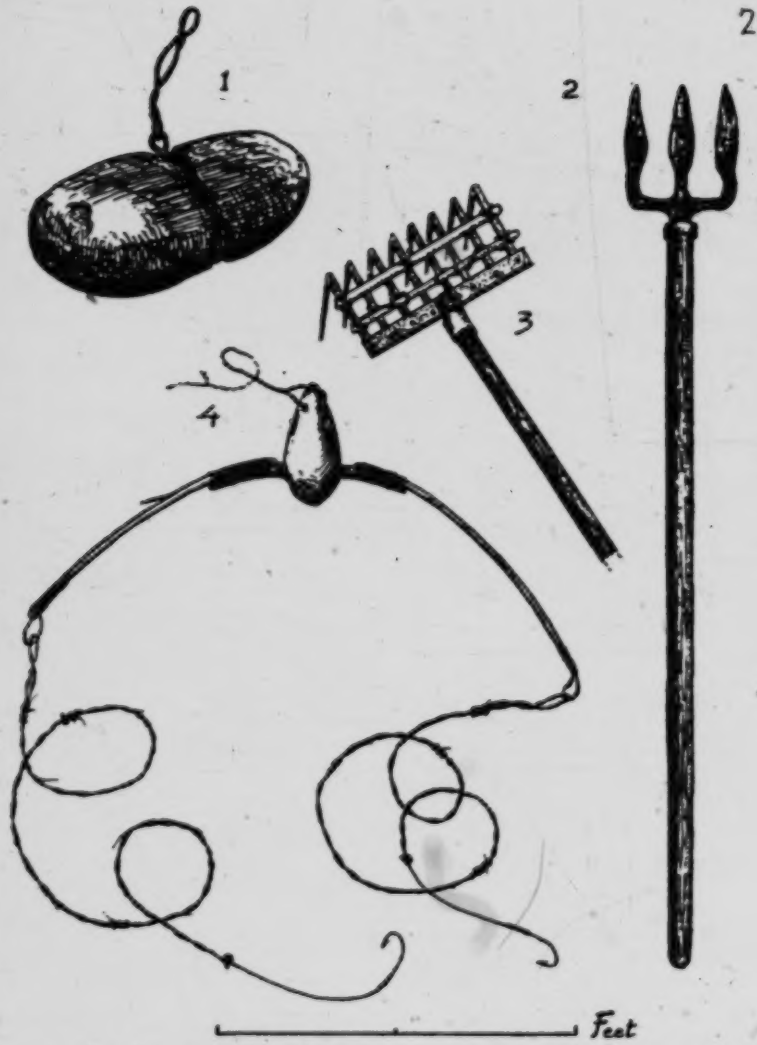

Fig. 74. Fishing gear. (1) Stone sinker for long lines, Co. Antrim (scale ×⅓). (2) Fork for digging lug worms, Co. Down. (3) Mussel rake, Co. Louth. Handle 15 ft. (after H. G. Tempest). (4) 'Frog' with horsehair crops for codling fishing, Co. Down (scale ×⅓).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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FIG. 75. Fishing weirs and curragh pens. *Above:* wattled head weir in River Bride, Co. Waterford (after Went). *Centre:* old stone fishing weirs at Newcastle, Co. Down. *Below:* curragh pens, Achill Island, Co. Mayo (after Piggott).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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223 Faeroe Islands[1] were practised in a region which has so many culture parallels with the northern isles.

Down to recent times coast-dwellers also took their toll of
225 seals and porpoises. 'We thought more of a seal in those days', wrote Thomas O'Crohan of the Blaskets, 'than of the very best pig.'[2] They were valued too for their skins, which as we have mentioned made covers for the curraghs and shoes for the rock-
[481] climbers. Seal hunting was dangerous work, sometimes involving swimming into the underwater caves where they breed.
[292] The seal catchers in County Cork wore 'bags quilted with charcoal' on their arms, for the animals let go their hold when they bit on the crunching charcoal.[3] In the Blaskets porpoises were slaughtered after being driven ashore by boats, and then 'everyone was crimson with the blood of the sea-pigs'.[4] The
[251] meat was salted down.

Crabs and lobsters, like so many other seafoods, are now
226 neglected and even despised, though there are commercial
[228] fisheries in areas accessible to markets. Apart from creel fishing they were formerly taken from the rock holes where they lie, either by hand or with an iron hook. In County Kerry one man would hold another under the water with an oar while he
[481] searched the holes. The old-style pots or creels are circular,
●[227] with a flat weighted bottom, sometimes hinged: the principle rods are of hazel or even whin, the woven sides of sally, laurel or heather stems. They vary in pattern from one district to another, as do the round-topped rectangular net-creels which have taken their place almost everywhere (Fig. 76). The lobstermen are a hardy breed, many of them having turned
[578] from long-line fishing, and they have kept up the feuds and rivalries to which the long-liners were addicted. In both types of fishing the search for bait is an exacting occupation. I illustrate a special fork used for digging lug worms, and also a mussel rake (Fig. 74).

222 If it is difficult to obtain information about the history of
674 such tools and activities as these, which have been the concern

[1] K. Williamson, *The Atlantic Islands*, ch. 6. [Text continues on p. 232]
[2] T. O'Crohan, *The Islandman*, 89.
[3] E. Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland*, 2, 127.
[4] T. O'Crohan, op. cit., 12.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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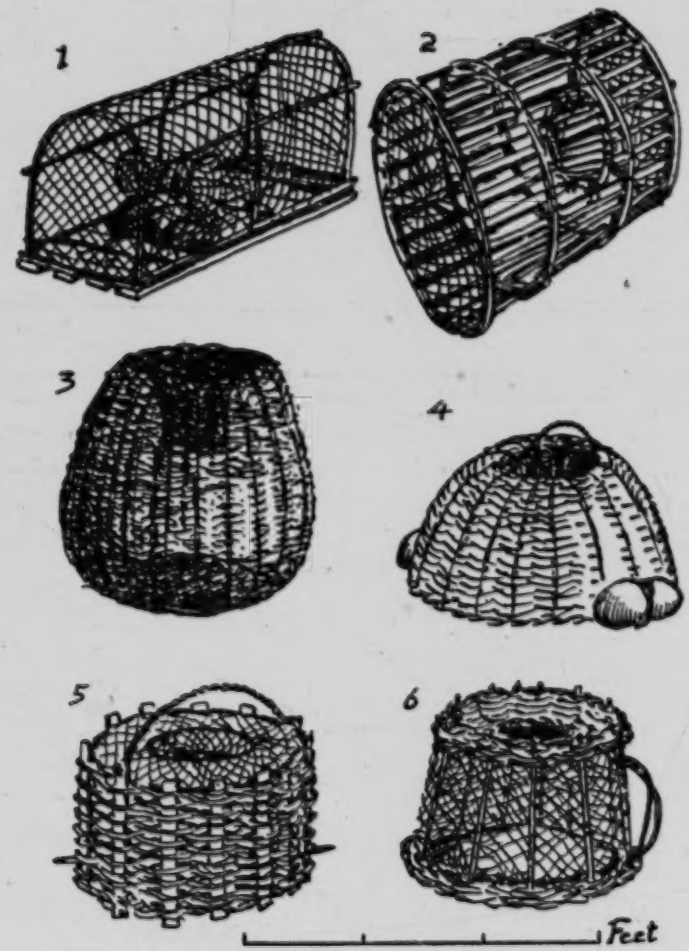

FIG. 76. Creels and pots. (1) Lobster, Co. Antrim. (2) Crayfish, French pattern south and west coasts. (3) Lobster, Co. Mayo. (4) Crab, Co. Antrim. (5) Buckie, Co. Down. (6) Crab, Co. Down.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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been recognized by the courts. 'Bobbing' for eels with a ball of worms attached to a string is practised on dark stormy nights, and on the River Bann a vicious-looking eel-rake is used to jab among the river weeds. Its teeth of sharp steel, often discarded hackle-pins, are set an inch apart in the end of a long pole. Bone pins of prehistoric date recovered in quantities from the bed of the river may have been put to a similar use, and this method of catching fish, probably of ancient origin, is widely distributed. There are specimens of eel-rakes in the Danish museums (Fig. 79). A very similar eel-comb is known in China, and a herring rake, used by the native fishermen of north-western America and mounted with sharp bone teeth, was first described by Captain Cook in 1778.[1] For taking salmon, poachers in the River Barrow use a staked net fashioned into a conical trap, and trout are taken in the north of Ireland in home-made 'loop nets' large enough to bridge small streams (Fig. 80). Salmon are also 'strokehauled' with naked hooks, and gaffed when within reach of the river banks. Trout are taken not only by 'ginling' (tickling) but also with a 'dull' or horsehair noose.

[171]

Dr. Went has made a careful study of Irish fish spears and the interested reader may be referred to his paper.[2] It may be mentioned that two of the three classes of eel-spears which he describes have been recovered from crannogs of the Dark Ages: they are the barbed spears known as rock- or sun-spears, so named from the conditions which are required for the eels to be impaled, and the more common mud-spears, which are within the law and of which excellent specimens can still be seen in parts of the country. They have flat tines, notched at the sides to prevent the enmeshed eels escaping. Spears of this type are plunged blindly into the mud. Consequently they are often very large and heavy, a seven-pronged example from the River Bann weighing over nine pounds and having a handle 30 feet long. Old specimens have a circular aperture at the junction of each pair of tines which facilitated the removal of the eels. The advantage of the mud-spear, which has a much wider distribution than the primitive looking rock-spear (which is apparently

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[1] *Captain Cook's Third Voyage*, Ed. C. R. Low (N.D.), 395.
[2] A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 82 (1952), 109–34.

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13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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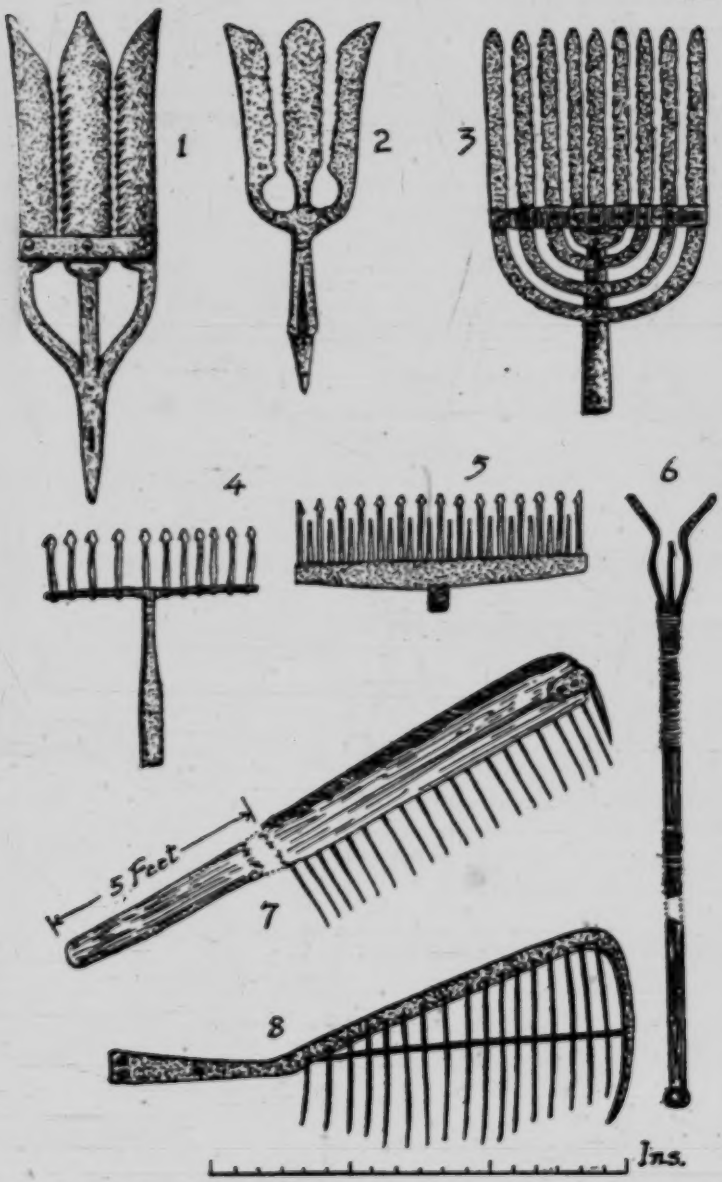

Fig. 79. Eel spears and rakes. (1) Mud-spear, Co. Antrim. (2, 3) Mud-spears, Co. Westmeath (after Went). (4, 5) Rock- or sun-spears, Co. Westmeath (after Went). (6) Wexford harbour eel-spear (after Went). (7) Eel-rake, River Bann (after N. C. Mitchel). (8) Eel-rake, Denmark (National Museum, Copenhagen).

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13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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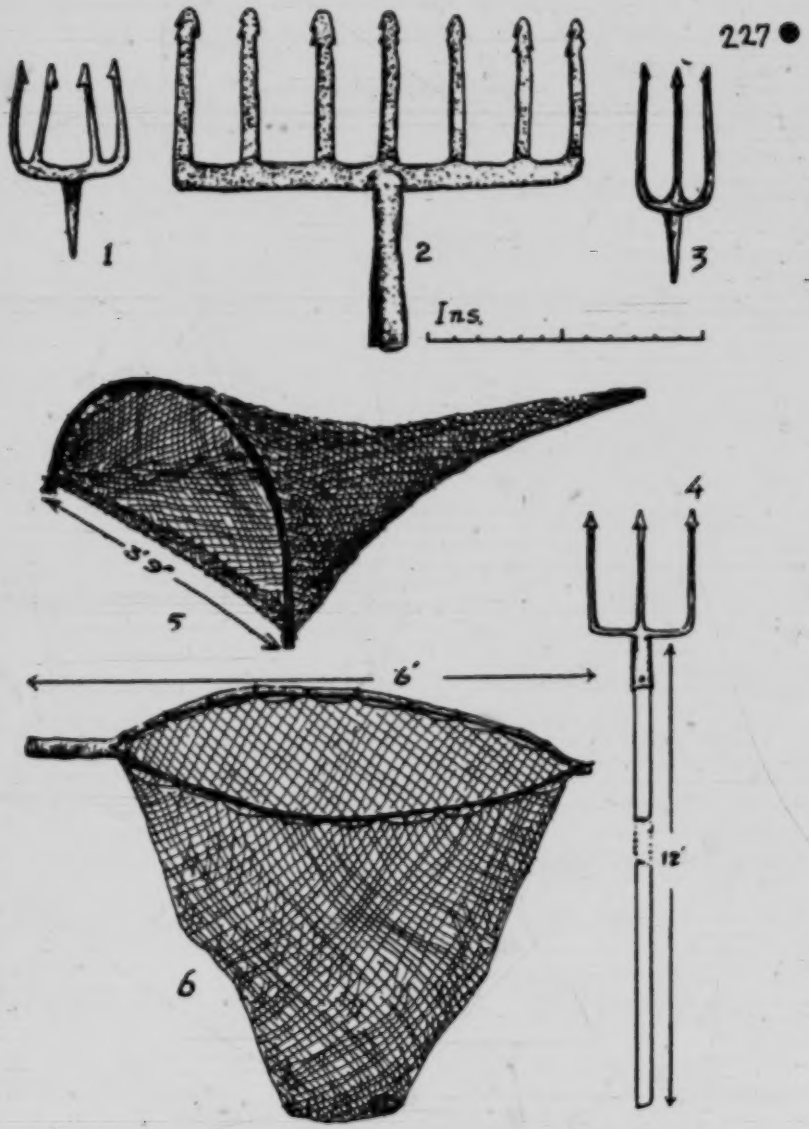

Fig. 80. Salmon spears and river nets. (1) River Mulcaire (after Went). (2) River Suir (after Went). (3) Co. Down. (4) Co. Antrim. (5) Co. Donegal. (6) Co. Tyrone (after E. N. Carrothers).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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confined to Co. Westmeath) is that the eel was undamaged and its skin could therefore be utilized. Apart from their use as thongs and flail-hangings eel-skins were worn as charms against rheumatic pains. Eel fat, too, is esteemed as a cure for rheumatism. The third type of eel-spear is quite different in form and methods of use. It is confined to Wexford Harbour and would appear to be a relic of Scandinavian influence in that half-foreign south-eastern corner of Ireland comprising the baronies of Bargy and Forth. It consists of two splayed prongs between which is ingeniously mounted a single barbed prong on to which the eel is guided by the outer members (Fig. 79). When the tide covers the mudflats the fisherman lies in a punt with his head over the prow, and with a spear in each hand propels the boat until he spies an eel in the mud, when his punting pole becomes a weapon. At low tide the eel fishers wear yard-long 'scooches' or mud-shoes, wooden boards turned up at the front like miniature skis. We note in passing that boards were formerly worn by both men and horses in working on soft bogs in Co. Mayo.[1]

The salmon spear or leister, being illegal, is normally a light three-pronged instrument, but large specimens weighing up to eight pounds and made after the fashion of the Westmeath eel-spears are found on the River Suir (Fig. 80). The fish were attracted at night by 'burning the river' with resinous splits of bog-fir or lumps of peat soaked in oil.

Riverine weirs of many kinds have been the privilege of religious houses and landed properties through the ages, and many examples specially designed for the capture of migratory fish, salmon and eels are maintained. There are traditions of temporary weirs of heather stems weighted down with stones, into which trout were driven to be extracted when the bundles of heather were pitched on to the bank. Gerard Boate describes the weirs in his day as consisting of 'big stones set close together from the one side of the river to the other, leaving only one hole . . . before which hole a basket being laid, they take therein a great quantity of fish'.[2] 'Fish baskets' and 'weels' are referred to in many ancient fishing grants, but I have not

[1] J. McParlan, *Mayo*, 94.
[2] Gerard Boate, *Ireland's Natural History*, 70.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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come across surviving examples of these ancient devices. The iron 'cribs' associated with modern salmon weirs, however, appear to derive from wattled traps. And the long conical 'coghill' nets in which the eels are caught in the weirs of the Bann, the Shannon and (until recently) the Erne, are shaped like weels and indeed they are sometimes built up of a series of cones. The fine meshed 'tail' of the net is made to open and the eels, nowadays, are poured directly into submerged tanks. A detail suggestive of long custom is that the 'skiver' with which the tail is closed in the coghills of the weirs at Portna on the Bann consists of a perforated rib-bone of horse or cow. The pin is attached to a cord, which is wound round the end of the net and secured by thrusting the pin into the windings. The walls of the weirs are often still built of wattles, and the old style of weir on the Erne consists of a base of large stones into which the wattled superstructure is thrust.[1]

The wattles are known on the Bann as *skeaghs*: of the six weirs now fishing there four are of the traditional type and two have been modernized. At Athlone on the Shannon there were twenty-two eel weirs in the early seventeenth century, and nearly all were still working in the nineteenth century: a single weir is now fished there.[2] The eel weirs of the River Erne had been reduced to five when they were abandoned owing to the recent construction of a dam for the Ballyshannon hydro-electric scheme. The Bann silver eel fisheries are probably the largest of their kind in western Europe, and it is significant that the Bann is one of the richest rivers in Europe for archaeological discoveries ranging in date from the Mesolithic to the early medieval period. Both salmon and eels have now become money-crops and the catches are exported. Already in the eighteenth century Irish salt salmon was exported in considerable quantities to America. The ice-house in which salmon used to be preserved is one of the many ruined buildings to be seen about the decaying houses of the gentry, and most country houses also had their fish ponds.

Among the common folk eels are esteemed only by the folk who catch them, legally or otherwise, but they were formerly

[1] A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 75 (1945), 213–23.
[2] A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 80 (1950), 146–54.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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pre-Gaelic tongues, and there can be little doubt that the eel fishery is prehistoric in origin. The draft nets in which pollan are caught in the lake—the pollan is a fresh-water herring peculiar to some Irish and Scottish lakes—also display old features. The sections, known as webs, are sewn together with a bone needle into long nets, which are weighted with stone sinkers. The draft-net is widely used in the salmon rivers, as described on the Boyne earlier in this chapter, and references to draft-netting go back to the twelfth century. On some rivers tall towers are erected from which a watcher signals the presence of fish.[1]

We are not here concerned with the commercial offshore fisheries, but something must be said of the inshore fishing because it has been characteristically combined with farming all around the coast. This type of fishing was well suited to the Irish crofter economy, so that the comment frequently made by improving visitors and despairing Government officials was that the Irish would not go out to fish, but waited for the fish to come close inshore. The shore-dwelling farmer is knowledgeable about the ways of fish and knows all 'the signs'. He has been accustomed to keep a net to hand and watch for shoals of different fish at the right seasons. There are watching points on the cliffs overlooking many a small bay, and it was from such vantage points on the south and west coasts that the pilchard 'huers' directed the seine boats to the shoals that visit Ireland intermittently.[2] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Irish pilchard fishery grew to large proportions but it has now declined to something like its older local significance. When the industry was capitalized by promoters like Sir William Petty it was the train oil pressed out during the packing of the pilchards for export which found an Irish market. It was used both as a luminant and in the preparation of leather. The seine boats have now turned their attention to herring and mackerel, and Dr. Went has pointed out that the seine is used for catching salmon only in Kenmare Bay, where Petty introduced it for pilchard fishing about the year 1672.

In the Irish Sea the herrings come close inshore in September

[1] A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 85 (1955), 22–23, Pl. 5A.
[2] A. E. J. Went, *J.C.H. and A. Soc.*, 51 (1946), 137–57.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

household. Some cats have reverted to a wild state and roam the back of the island, sheep occasionally are killed by hungry dogs, and young people will entertain themselves by baiting dogs to fight. By and large, animals, especially asses, in Inis Beag are treated roughly or with indifference.

Fishing

It is estimated that between 30 and 50 three-men crews from Inis Beag fished regularly almost the year around at the beginning of the century. At that time there were ten families of fisherfolk—six in Low Village, two in High, and one each in the other two communities—who subsisted mainly on money obtained from the sale of their catches or by bartering fish for needed goods and services. Only farming and kelp-making intermittently interfered with the fishing regime of landholders, and fishing ceased altogether only for parts of December and January, when inclement weather and the Christmas season intruded. Women and children were deeply involved in the fishing endeavor, just as they were in farming and livestock rearing, to free their menfolk for fishing. Crews ranged the coast of Inis Beag and neighboring islands, the two sounds, the mainland coast for 20 miles, and Atlantic shallows 5 to 8 miles offshore. Lines 40 fathoms in length were "shot" for ling and cod, and nets over a mile in length were drifted to ensnare spring mackerel. At times when fish were particularly abundant, fishermen would be out daily for a week or two, arising long before dawn to have their lines down before daybreak, and returning home as late as midnight.

Sixty years later, a sharply contrasting situation prevails, wherein not only has the exporting of fish almost been discontinued, but fish no longer rank as a major staple in the diet of the folk and are not even eaten several months of the year. Nine three-men crews fished fairly regularly with nets and lines between February and October of 1960 and exported or sold locally part of their catches, and two crews fished for lobsters. Fishing now is carried on within a mile of the island, and only one crew ventured as far as the mainland in 1960. It was customary in the past for crews to fish for two consecutive days off a mainland peninsula and sleep overnight in their canoes or lodge in a villlage there, a venture which required over 30 miles of backbreaking labor at the oars. Line fishing today is done in shallow waters, only short nets are employed, and the men do not care to spend long hours at their task. Elders bemoan the present state of affairs for several reasons, one of them being the loss of fishing lore accumulated over the centuries —knowledge of the ocean floor, of deep currents, of the habitats and movements of fish, not to mention knowledge relating to the manufacture and care of fishing gear and fishing techniques themselves.

Most important of the factors which gradually have restricted fishing are the actions of foreign trawlers—particularly Spanish and French ones, the shift of migratory routes of fish, and long range changes in the weather. During the 1890s, foreign trawlers commenced to fish the waters surrounding Inis Beag, and in the decades since they have increased in number and have fished ever closer to the coast, until now they often penetrate within the legal limit. Not only have

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(1959-1960) Inis Beag

duced trawlers and other types of fishing vessels and financed their purchase by islanders of the region, sent instructors to teach fishermen how to use the new boats and gear, set up curing and storage facilities in the islands, facilitated the shipping of fish to mainland markets, and attempted to regulate these markets so as to ensure maximum profits for the folk. These efforts failed for the most part in Inis Beag, and today the men fish from *curach*, much as did their grandfathers. The continuing effort of the government to improve fishing in the area is reflected in instruction in modern fishing techniques at a school in a nearby island, and the successful operation of a number of government financed trawlers and other fishing boats from there.

The islanders consider fish from the sea, which are netted, more palatable and healthier to eat than those caught with lines and trawls, fresh water fish, and fish which have been cured or frozen. Fish taken on lines, because they bleed, and those enmeshed in trawls, because they suffocate, are thought to suffer in taste and nourishment, as do those which are treated artificially for sale; and fresh water fish are believed to be unhealthy to eat because they feed on refuse thrown into lakes and rivers rather than on natural foods. Some folk exclude even mackerel from their diet, since these fish "swim on the surface and eat everything dirty afloat." We already have noted that Inis Beag elders prefer seaweed to chemical fertilizers; the preference for netted fish which feed on natural foods to fresh water fish and mackerel which are contaminated is another example of a recurrent cultural theme—the positive valuation of natural objects and the negative valuation of artificial ones which come in contact with the human body. Other manifestations of this theme are the emphasis placed on folk medicines and the distrust of medicines prescribed by nurse and doctor, the belief that certain foods will assure health and combat specific illnesses, and the fear of piped water and canned foods. I often was told that I could improve my eyesight by giving up my glasses and rubbing dew on my eyelids, or by walking along the seashore to allow the wind and spray to penetrate my eyeballs.

Over 30 varieties of fish are caught off Inis Beag, some with lines of varying length and number of hooks, others in the four types of nets, and a few with both lines and nets. Most important of the fish are: ling, cod, bream, gurnet, haddock, and autumn mackerel caught with lines; plaice, turbot, rock fish, and pollack both netted and taken on lines; and herring and spring mackerel captured in special nets. Trammel and drag nets are used in addition to herring and mackerel nets, and the most commonly used baits are gurnet, haddock, conger eel, bream, herring, and limpets. Fishing techniques vary considerably, as do the times of the year when particular kinds of fish are available, the localities that they frequent, and the baits which are most effective for each variety. Fishing crews form at different times of the year, often to fish in certain areas for specific fish. They are composed of both kin and close friends, and they tend to alter in membership from year to year as other activities intrude.

Before I leave the subject of fishing, I wish to correct three commonly held misconceptions concerning Inis Beag men: they are all skilled seamen; because they spend much of their time at sea they are of necessity able swimmers; and